

PLAUTUS OR PLOTUS GUNNERUS, 1761, PLAUTUS KLEIN, 1760,
PLOTUS LINNAEUS, PLAUTUS BRÜNNICH, 1772 (AVES): PROPOSED
REJECTION OR SUPPRESSION UNDER THE PLENARY POWERS.
Z.N.(S.) 1911

By Dean Amadon (*Chairman, Department of Ornithology, American Museum of Natural History*), Eugene Eisenmann (*Chairman, American Ornithologists' Union Committee on Classification and Nomenclature*), George E. Watson III (*Chairman, Department of Vertebrate Zoology, U.S. National Museum*), Alexander Wetmore (*Smithsonian Institution*)

1. The name *Plautus* or *Plotus* has been applied to birds of at least four genera, belonging to three different families. Currently one or the other is used as the generic name for the Little Auk or Dovekie, an abundant Arctic species, which intermittently invades the Temperate Zone in numbers. Both spellings are credited to Gunnerus (1761, *Trondhiemske Selskabs Skrifter* 1: 236-270). Gunnerus in his paper wrote "*Plotus* eller *Plautus*". In American publications the name is uniformly spelled *Plautus*, in European it is usually written *Plotus*. Richmond, who revived Gunnerus' name, and acted as first reviser (1917, *Proc. U.S. Natl. Mus.* 53: 615), selected *Plautus*, presumably because that spelling was used on the plate or because it was employed by the earlier non-Linnaean author (Moehring, 1752) cited by Gunnerus. The usual European spelling follows Hartert (1921, *Die Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna*), who favoured the strictest positional anteriority, in disregard of the first reviser rule. Very recently Wetmore and Watson (1969, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club*, 89: 6-7) have pointed out that Gunnerus' name, in whatever form, must be rejected, because "Gunnerus was not consistently binomial in his 1761 paper, even in the sentence in which he cited the names".

2. Both *Plautus* and *Plotus* have been applied to other genera. Being already compromised, the preservation of either by resort to the plenary powers seems undesirable. Thus, before Gunnerus, *Plautus* was employed by Klein for a gull, now known as *Larus hyperboreus*, in a non-binominal translation of a pre-Linnaean Latin work (1760, *Historie der Vögel*: 154). Though Klein's name seems never to have been used again as the name of a gull, it has been cited in synonymy. *Plotus* was used by Linnaeus (1766, *Systema Naturae* (12th ed.) 1: 218) for the genus currently called *Anhinga* Brisson, 1760, belonging to a different family. *Plautus* was employed by Brünnich (1772, *Zool. Praelect. Acad. Accom.*: 78) for the Great Auk, a species currently placed in the monotypic genus *Pinguinus* Bonnaterre (1791, *Tabl. Encycl. et Method. Orn.*: lxxxi, 28).

3. The rejection of *Plautus* or *Plotus* of Gunnerus for the Little Auk should occasion little difficulty, because there is an early, well-known, name available: *Alle* Link (1807, *Beschreib. der Nat. Samml. Univer. Rostok* 2: 46), which was used generally before Richmond's revival of Gunnerus' name. Moreover the current specific name of the Little Auk is *alle*. Link's name was employed at least as late as 1919 in America and 1921 in Europe. *Alle* has not been used for any other bird, so far as we are aware.

4. As pointed out by Wetmore and Watson (op. cit.), one troublesome problem appears, which is the reason for this application. With the elimination of *Plautus* Gunnerus, 1761, as non-binominal, the later *Plautus* Brünnich, 1772, ceases to be a junior homonym, and becomes available for another genus, as senior synonym of the currently used *Pinguinus* Bonnaterre, 1791. *Pinguinus* is today universally used for the famous, extinct, Great Auk (called "Pingouin" in French); general use of this generic name dates back some fifty years. Transferring the generic name of one well-known genus to another genus equally well-known is obviously undesirable. The birds involved are referred to constantly in the literature, which must run into hundreds of publications. The statute of limitations (Art. 23b) is not automatically applicable to preserve *Pinguinus*, for *Plautus* was used for the Great Auk by some authors at least to 1919, and probably for a few years later, when *Plautus* was shifted to the Little Auk, on the basis of Gunnerus' authorship. Another shift after fifty years would simply increase the confusion. It is best to get rid of *Plautus* altogether. *Pinguinus*, on the other hand, should be preserved, for it has been used only for the Great Auk genus.

5. The American Ornithologists' Union Committee on Classification and Nomenclature has in progress a new edition of the A.O.U. Check-list of North American Birds, in which both genera are involved. This committee has voted to recommend the present proposal and urges a prompt decision. Many other current publications are affected. The British Ornithologist' Union is preparing a new British Check-list and undoubtedly is also interested in an early decision.

6. Accordingly we urge that, to prevent confusion and to promote stability and universality, the names *Plautus* and *Plotus*, of whatever authorship, be suppressed, for purposes of the Law of Priority but not for those of the Law of Homonymy. This would leave *Alle* as the generic name for the Little Auk or Dovekie (now *Alle alle*), and *Pinguinus* as the generic name for the Great Auk (*Pinguinus impennis*).

7. The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature accordingly is requested:

- (1) to use its plenary powers to suppress the generic name *Plautus* Brünnich, 1772, for the purposes of the Law of Priority but not for those of the Law of Homonymy;
- (2) to place the following generic names on the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology;
 - (a) *Alle* Link, 1807 (gender : feminine), type-species, by monotypy, *Alca alle* Linnaeus, 1758;
 - (b) *Pinguinus* Bonnaterre, 1791 (gender : feminine), type-species, by designation by Ogilvie-Grant, 1898 (*Cat. Birds Brit. Mus.* 26 : 562), *Alca impennis* Linnaeus, 1758;
- (3) to place the following specific names on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology;
 - (a) *alle* Linnaeus, 1758, *Syst. Nat.* (ed. 10) 1 : 131, as published in the binomen *Alca alle* (type-species of *Alle* Link, 1807);

- (b) *impennis* Linnaeus, 1758, *Syst. Nat* (ed. 10) 1 : 130, as published in the binomen *Alca impennis* (type-species of *Pinguinus* Bonnatere, 1791);
- (4) to place the following generic names on the Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Generic Names in Zoology:
 - (a) *Plautus* Klein, 1760 (published in a non-binominal work);
 - (b) *Plautus* Gunnerus, 1761 (published in a non-binominal work);
 - (c) *Plotus* Gunnerus, 1761 (published in a non-binominal work);
 - (d) *Plautus* Brunnich, 1772 (as suppressed under the plenary powers in (1) above).